Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-7 (canceled):

Claim 8 (withdrawn): A method for producing *in vitro* the RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity encoded by hepatitis C virus (HCV), comprising the step of incubating together HCV NS5B, ribonucleotide substrates, and a RNA template, under conditions suitable to produce said RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity, provided that said incubating takes place *in vitro*.

Claim 9 (withdrawn): The method of claim 8, wherein said NS5B is purified.

Claim 10 (withdrawn): The method of claim 9, wherein said NS5B has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:1.

Claim 11 (withdrawn): The method of claim 8, wherein said NS5B is produced from a NS2-NS3-NS4-NS5 polyprotein by means of multiple proteolytic events that occur in an organism expressing nucleic acid encoding said NS2-NS3-NS4-NS5 polyprotein, followed by purification of said NS5B.

Claim 12 (currently amended): A method for identifying a HCV RNA-dependent RNA polymerase inhibitor comprising:

(a) ~~combining~~ incubating *in vitro* a composition comprising a purified HCV NS5B recombinant protein, ribonucleotide substrates, an RNA template, and a test compound, under conditions suitable to produce NS5B RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity in the absence of said compound, wherein said recombinant protein was expressed in either a eukaryotic or prokaryotic heterologous system and purified to apparent homogeneity; and

(b) measuring the ability of said compound to affect said NS5B RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.

Claim 13 (canceled):

Claim 14 (previously presented): The method of claim 12, wherein said method measures primer independent RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.

Claim 15 (canceled):

Claim 16 (canceled):

Claim 17 (previously presented): The method of 12, wherein said NS5B has the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:1.

Claim 18 (previously presented): The method of claim 12, wherein said NS5B is produced from a NS2-NS3-NS4-NS5 polyprotein by means of multiple proteolytic events that occur in an organism expressing nucleic acid encoding said NS2-NS3-NS4-NS5 polyprotein, followed by purification of said NS5B.

Claim 19 (canceled):

Claim 20 (New): A method for identifying a HCV RNA-dependent RNA polymerase inhibitor comprising:

(a) incubating *in vitro* a composition comprising a purified HCV NS5B recombinant protein, ribonucleotide substrates, an RNA template, and a test compound, under conditions suitable to produce NS5B RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity in the absence of said compound, wherein said recombinant protein was expressed in either a eukaryotic or

prokaryotic heterologous system and purified to apparent homogeneity, wherein said NS5B is the only HCV protein present during said incubating; and

(b) measuring the ability of said compound to affect said NS5B RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.

Claim 21 (New): The method of claim 20, wherein said method measures primer independent RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.

Claim 22 (New): A method for identifying a HCV RNA-dependent RNA polymerase inhibitor comprising:

(a) incubating *in vitro* a composition comprising HCV NS5B, ribonucleotide substrates, an RNA template, and a test compound, under conditions suitable to produce NS5B RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity in the absence of said compound, wherein said HCV NS5B was expressed in either a eukaryotic or prokaryotic heterologous system; and

(b) measuring the ability of said compound to affect said NS5B RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.

Claim 23 (New): The method of claim 22, wherein said method measures primer independent RNA-dependent RNA polymerase activity.